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ABSTRACT

This report discusses college English preparatory or gifted and honors English classes and describes research conducted with students from four college preparatory English classes in 1974. The study involved 96 academically talented seniors who were asked to respond to two structurally dissimilar novels, a free-verse poem and a short story. The major finding from the study was that the form of a literary selection had a significant influence on students' response to that selection. Approximately three-fourths of the students proved inconsistent in their choices of response modes when responding to dissimilar literary selections. The traditional novel with a strong story line and standard structural pattern elicited a form-oriented response mode. Neither a form nor content orientation was clearly observable in students when they responded to the nontraditional novel. (MKM)

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Title: Literature for Gifted Young Adults and Their Response to That Literature

I have been fortunate in my teaching career to have taught gifted as well as other students. Working with gifted and talented students, one can come to believe that all students are gifted; and one must go back into the real world of the heterogeneous classroom to find that, unfortunately, such is not true.

Gifted and talented students comprise approximately two to three percent of the student population. Some schools have more gifted enrolled than other schools, partly because of the communities served: differing housing patterns or socio-economic areas and, in my own experience, proximity to a major university, the University of Washington. Many of those enrolled in my classes when I taught in Seattle were from homes of professional educators. Presently, I teach in an isolated small community of retired persons with widely-traveled and relatively affluent families whose youngest children are just completing their high school years. In small as well as large high schools, in rural as well as suburban and urban schools, the gifted persist if we recognize them, encourage them, and provide programs for them.

At the public high school level to encourage students with high abilities, educators tend to group them in diverse programs: homogeneous honors classes, Advanced Placement seminars, tutorials with independent courses of study, and enrichment classes such as humanities programs. The size of the high school, the number of gifted students enrolled in that school, and the areas of their talents determine best how a school can mobilize its English program to enhance the success of such students. High schools with small enrollments may opt for a tutorial process; the College Board has issued recently a brochure explaining the use of the tutorial for Advanced Placement in English in small high schools. Larger high schools can offer one or more classes designed specifically for talented or high-achieving students in composition and in literature. Some schools combine English and social studies (often along with art and music appreciation) to produce humanities programs. Other enrichment activities include speakers, field trips, and centers for gifted students. In Washington state, the Centrum Foundation, located at Port Townsend, provides one-week

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workshops in which gifted students meet with other talented students and with professional artists, writers, and thinkers.

The concepts of acceleration and early graduation have persisted for gifted high school students, even when factors of physical maturation, lack of participation in extracurricular activities, and social pressures are apparent. Gifted students and their parents have demanded that schools provide more meaningful programs for the gifted while they are enrolled within high school. The Advanced Placement Examination in English, offered by the College Entrance Examination Board, is one possible choice when planning programs and offering acceleration opportunities to the gifted. In May of each year, Advanced Placement exams are administered on a nation-wide basis. The student's success on that exam brings advanced credits or advanced placement or both upon college entrance, with the specific college determining the number of credits of advanced placement granted. For example, the University of Washington awards from three to ten quarter hours of credit in English dependent on the student's test results. English courses directed toward Advanced Placement offer the gifted student intellectual satisfaction: the student studies works of literary significance in a manner approved by scholars in the field. The student learns the requisite writing and literary skills to succeed in advanced study. Simultaneously, the student earns advanced placement which moves him or her more quickly into a major field of university study by satisfying lower division credits upon college entrance. With an Advanced Placement program, educators can provide acceleration without removing the high school student from the high school community.

In 1978, Sequim High School began another program for talented students in English. Tried elsewhere, it was new to Washington state. Similar to Advanced Placement, it provides the student advanced credit upon college entrance, but differs in that the program has been developed locally, between the University of Washington and our high school, and that advanced credit does not depend upon the results of a single examination. The University provides a coordinator, Eugene Smith, from their Department of English; and another teacher, Ellen Binns, and I serve as adjunct instructors for the University of Washington as well as English teachers within the high school. Presently, twenty-five selected seniors are enrolled in the two-semester College English class, which combines instruction in expository writing and in writing about literature. The course requirements and course work, including textbooks, are identical to those of English 111 and English 181 at the University of Washington. The students pay

college tuition and purchase their own texts. They receive two sets of grades, their high school grades and their college grades (which may or may not be the same). Students receive upon course completion ten quarter hours of university credit and, simultaneously, satisfy their requirements for high school graduation. More importantly, however, they receive instruction in writing skills and in study of literature at an advanced level. They gain self-confidence and self-esteem from attempting college-level study while in high school. The class challenges senior boredom of the gifted by requiring higher levels of quality and achievement from them.

Grouping the gifted in honors classes, independent study, or enrichment activities is an administrative and departmental strategy for meeting the needs of the gifted. Much more significant than grouping for special abilities is what happens within the special classes. Quality of teachers, students, literature, and involvement with that literature become all important. Teachers must be knowledgeable and well trained in the many aspects of English, indicated at least in part by advanced degrees. They must appreciate rather than be frightened by challenging ideas generated in bright young minds. Students, too, must be committed to quality programs. Desiring to succeed academically and frequently under pressure from parents to excel, the gifted in their high school years are very busy, often involved in several different activities in church and community as well as in school and athletic programs. They have scarcely any time to think deeply, to read, to write on their own, or to practice their specific talents. Thus, enrollment in such classes becomes essential for the gifted student. In such classes, the gifted reinforce each other. The ideas of one serve to challenge and stimulate the thinking of others; students radiate a new excitement when they can communicate with those class members whom they respect intellectually.

Within these classes, the content must be challenging, rich, and in depth, no superficial coverage of a period of literature from an anthology of fragmented writings. Gifted students should work with whole items rather than with parts. In math, a gifted student may need to complete only a few problems to master a concept; but in English, a gifted student will need a wealth of reading experience in order to develop verbal skills to a more advanced degree. For example, in the senior honors course which I taught in Seattle, students read works such as _All Quiet on the Western Front_, _Cry, the Beloved Country_, all the A. E. Housman poems in _A Shropshire Lad_, _The Iliad_, _Lord Jim_, _Hamlet_, _Oedipus Rex_, _A Passage_

to India, Crime and Punishment, and Austen's Northanger Abbey. While these students may not have chosen to read these selections on their own, preferring more contemporary or immediately-accessible works, the involvement with the artistry and the content of these selections, along with the interaction and stimulus of other students, provided a richly-satisfying program, far more than the use of a literature anthology might have provided.

Real involvement with the literature they study is critical for the gifted. Through the years, I noted that my talented students almost without exception would do very well on standard literary evaluation but would respond very differently to individual works regardless of how I altered instruction. Being relatively naive in the field of research at that time, I assumed that research literature held the answer to my concern. Such was not true. Ultimately, I undertook my own research to learn more of the gifted student's response to literature. In the process, I am deeply indebted to a number of research studies including Squire's study of response to short stories, Purves and Beach's survey of research in Literature and the Reader, and Rosenblatt's Literature as Exploration to cite only a few.

Previous research studies seemed to indicate that students respond in a consistent manner to a literary selection regardless of the specific selection. I questioned this generalization in that my students were inconsistent. Thus, the purpose of my descriptive study was to investigate the influence of the form of a literary selection on the responses that talented high school seniors made to that work. In 1974, I conducted the study with ninety-six academically-talented seniors in four college-preparatory English classes. All students were from a single high school and all had completed a course of study such as I outlined previously in which whole pieces of quality literature were read.

Since most of the earlier studies had measured response to short stories only, I included two structurally-dissimilar novels and a poem of free verse as well as a short story in my study. Works used were Crime and Punishment (a traditional novel), A Passage to India (a non-traditional novel), William Carlos Williams's short story "The Use of Force," and a poem translated by May Swenson, titled "Locked In." The short story and poem were read in a single class period, and the measures collected at that time. Each novel was studied by the classes over several weeks, and the measures for the novels were taken after the completion of study of each.

There are numerous design problems whenever one wishes to measure response to whole pieces of literature. Finding a measurement device was difficult. Because a number of research studies had used response categories classified

by Purves and Rippere. I consulted Alan Purves and obtained his permission to re-code the twenty-question Response Preference Measure, which had been used in his cross-national study, published as Literature Education in Ten Countries. I re-coded all twenty questions on the Response Preference Measure as form or content questions. Within the study, students were considered to have a dominant form or content response mode depending on the specific questions which they considered important about each of the four selections. In addition to the Response Preference Measure, other scales including the Rokeach Dogmatism Scale were used. Subsequently, a portion of the students were interviewed, also.

Time does not permit extended discussion of individual aspects of the study. Rather I would like to share with you some general findings and implications from the study, stressing that these students were academically-talented seniors at the end of their high school careers. Whatever their responses in their interaction with literature, their responses represent what we can expect from such students. The major finding from the study was that the form of a literary selection has a significant influence on students' response to that literary selection.

The students in this study tended to use different response modes which were predominantly content-oreinted or predominantly form-oriented depending on the form of the literary selection. The traditional novel with a strong story line and standard structural pattern elicited a content-oriented response mode. The non-traditional poem of free-verse elicited a form-oriented response mode. A form or content orientation was less clearly observable in students when they responded to the non-traditional novel in which the unusual structure, use of different language, or use of metaphoric patterns required more attention to form from the reader. Approximately three-fourths of these seniors proved inconsistent in their choices of response modes when responding to dissimilar literary selections. They shifted their response modes depending on the selection read. For teachers, such findings indicate that we shall need to examine the responses of our students to dissimilar materials. Response to one piece of literature will not be identical to a second piece of literature, especially when the second selection is markedly different in form. Nevertheless, different patterns of response do seem present for different literary genres.

Interestingly, approximately one-fourth of these students proved consistent in their use of a dominant response mode, and these twenty-three students were interviewed later. Sixteen of the twenty-three responded consistently with a form orientation; seven responded consistently with a content orientation.

Different approaches to literature seem required when students use predominantly form-oriented or predominantly content-oriented response modes. Form-oriented students may read poetry more willingly, surprisingly may be less willing to do close analysis of long novels, and may indicate a dislike of literary analysis even when they ordinarily respond to aspects of form within a work. Form-oriented readers may express interest in elements of content as well, particularly in the historical background of the work, in the development of the characterization, and in identification with characters. When commenting about aspects of form within a work, they tend to use greater specificity.

Content-oriented students tend to read more for story and for meaning. They tend to look for significant ideas and may find the work disappointing if the meaning of the work is not readily apparent. They may misunderstand the work in their desire to draw forth generalizations and major ideas. When interviewing these students, I shall never forget the first young man interviewed. Before I could begin, he asked if he might read me an essay he had written in response to the short story "The Use of Force." The story recounts a doctor's brutal examination of a child ill with diptheria. I could only listen as the young man removed a spiral notebook from his briefcase and began to read his essay which he titled "Victimless Crime." There were few references to the short story. Instead, he used the story as springboard to discuss an issue which disturbed him. I need not add that this student was one who had responded consistently with a content orientation during the study; in addition, he had a very high score on the Rokeach Dogmatism Scale. But his response to the story serves to remind us of the diverse responses of the gifted and talented.

Briefly summarized, other findings include:

1. Knowledge of literary terms is not a significant factor in the form or content orientation of these students; most were generally knowledgeable of literary terms and of the concepts which they represented.

2. Patterns of reading experiences are extremely important in the development of a form or content orientation. Form-oriented students had read more serious, advanced, and broadly-representative materials at an earlier age. Form-oriented students had read more poems and tended to read novels, short stories, and poems of better quality than had content-oriented students.

3. In general, recall of specific literary instruction from previous years was not extensive. Literary instruction seemed to have been internalized. Some form-oriented students tended to rely more on literary instruction received at early levels while content-oriented students seemed to rely on more recent instruction.

4. The form- or content-orientation of the reader does not necessarily influence the rating which a student gives to a literary selection, but the form of the selection itself does influence the rating. This finding suggests that form influences literary response in at least three different ways: (1) a general form-oriented or content-oriented tendency is present within the reader to any piece of literature, (2) the form of the dissimilar literary selections will require the reader to use different orientations, and (3) students have preferred forms of literature. Rosenblatt examines these factors in much depth in her new volume The Reader, the Text, and the Poem. Thus, students with different dominant orientations -- form or content -- may rate a work similarly because of a common response to its form or because of their preference of one genre more than another. That the traditional novel Crime and Punishment was rated so much more highly than the non-traditional novel A Passage to India suggests that for novels traditional form receives a very positive rating from academically-gifted seniors. When teachers include non-traditional novels in classroom study, they must be cognizant of the students' general form or content tendencies and students' preferences for a traditional novel form.

5. Within the study, these seniors tended to select certain response questions and to avoid other questions. Purves has indicated that students do tend to respond in certain patterns at least partly because of the instructional procedures used with them and because of the questions raised about the literature they study. Educators in English need to determine if indeed gifted and talented students are asking significant questions about the literature they study or if they are asking merely questions which less-gifted students could ask easily.

Above all, we need to consider the diverse responses of the gifted as they interact with both the content and the form of a literary work. Gifted students surprise us continuously with brilliant insights which brighten our lives.

I shall conclude with an anecdote published several years ago by NCTE in They Really Taught Us How to Write. This surprise occurred in an Advanced Placement Seminar in English, consisting of fifteen bright seniors. It was the end of the school year, just before their graduation; and the students and I had studied a number of major works from English and World Literature. The students were as exhausted as I. We did not need one more exam. From daily discussions, I thought I knew everything they might write in response to our final novel Jude the Obscure. I suggested that, rather than a final exam,

they prepare an open letter to the author Thomas Hardy. Since Hardy's death had occurred fifty years earlier, and we would have little chance for him to respond, I told the class that they should write as though they were talking directly to Hardy; the letters would then be placed on the bulletin board for the class members to read. The assignment surprised me greatly: first, much remained to be said about the novel. The letters revealed that. Each letter was different; and each letter was read eagerly by the other class members when it was placed on the bulletin board. One questioned Hardy's religion, accusing him of having slept in church. Another questioned his views on women. Another addressed him in contemporary vernacular as "Dear Tommy Baby." But the most surprising appeared on the very last day of class, when a note pushed under the door by a procrastinating class member, bore a formal apology to Hardy, and concluded:

> We have, of late, completed the perusal of your latest work, Jude the Obscure. We open-heartedly wish to express the satisfaction we experienced in the exploration of such a depressing and yet perhaps stimulating novel. We are excitedly anticipating your reply and your next novel, perhaps a sequel to, if you will forgive the abbreviation of your well-thought and developed title, Jude. . . . Most respectfully and sincerely yours, until I join you . . .

Regardless of diverse English programs provided for gifted young adults or the guarantees of quality within those programs, we must challenge bright young minds.

Session F-13 Commission on Literature Projects

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BACKGROUND, REQUIREMENTS, AND SYLLABUS FOR COLLEGE-LEVEL ENGLISH

SEQUIM HIGH SCHOOL - 1979-80 SCHOOL YEAR

SEQUIM, WASHINGTON 98382

Background

The Department of English at the University of Washington offers six courses at the freshman (100) level which are collectively known as "freshman English." No student in the College of Arts and Sciences is required to take any of these courses, although proficiency in expository writing is expected of all students. These courses are numbered and titled as follows: English 111 (College Writing: Writing about Literature); English 121 (College Writing: Issues, Topics, and Modes--Satire); English 122 (College Writing: Writing Workshop); English 171 (College Writing: Expository Prose); English 172 (College Writing: The Research Paper); English 181 (College Writing: Expository Prose). All of these except 171 and 172 are five-hour, graded courses, which may be taken in any order.

English 111 and 181, offered at Sequim High School, carry extension credit which should be transferrable to any two or four year college or university in the country.

Requirements

Achieving sufficient quality of work to meet university standards requires two principal conditions: 1) Students must realize that seriousness of purpose, sustained and self-directed effort, and a mature attitude toward reading and writing are essential; 2) Teachers of the courses must coordinate their assignments, teaching methods, and achievement expectations with university practices. Both of these requirements are met because the Sequim program has been closely coordinated with University of Washington programs. Professor Eugene Smith, of the University of Washington Department of English, will continue to serve as consultant during the 1979-80 school year to talk with students and teachers, help design curriculum and teaching procedures, and read and evaluate student writing.

Two texts are required for English 181: Writing with a Purpose (Houghton Mifflin, 1976) and Subject and Strategy: A Rhetoric Reader (St. Martin's Press, 1978). The texts for English 111 are Norton Introduction to Literature (Norton, 1978) and selected texts.

A student who completes English 181 during the first semester is automatically eligible to enroll for English 111 in the second semester. Though it is not required, taking both courses is strongly encouraged.

Syllabus

The principal objective of English 181 is the development of clear, coherent, careful writing. Most of the writing is in the expository form, the writing most often associated with academic settings. Emphasis is on generating and organizing ideas, using suitable and convincing evidence, and developing a style which allows both for individual preferences and for conventions of formal prose. Students will read and analyze essays by well-known writers and by their classmates, with attention to purpose, audience, organizational strategies, and style. They will write almost constantly, practicing the techniques of skillful writers and with the teachers' assistance, learning to evaluate their own and other students' writing. A final evaluation of each student's performance in writing will be made by the classroom teachers, in consultation with Professor Smith.

English 111 has two principal objectives: development of prose style and introduction to drama, fiction, and poetry. Most of the writing will be in response to the literature--both analysis of content and literary technique and applications to contemporary life